



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

SNAKE RIVER BASIN OFFICE

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December 16, 1999

#99-95/SRBO#99-10

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DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT AND PLUM CREEK NATIVE FISH HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN RELEASED FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service (“Services”) have released a *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)* evaluating a proposal by Plum Creek Timber Company to implement a plan to conserve native fish habitat on 1.7 million acres of Plum Creek land in Montana, Idaho and Washington. Almost 90% of the area covered by the *Plum Creek Native Fish Habitat Conservation Plan (NFHCP)* — about 1.5 million acres — occurs in Montana.

Documents may be viewed on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s web site (<http://www.fws.gov/r1srbo/SRBO/PlumCk.htm>), or copies may be requested from the Services. Compact disc and hard-bound copies are available upon request. Public comments on the DEIS/NFHCP will be accepted through February 17, 2000.

A habitat conservation plan (HCP) is an agreement between the federal government and a private landowner under which the landowner is permitted to conduct activities that may negatively impact species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The landowner is granted an “incidental take permit” allowing some short-term impacts to the species in exchange for long-term protection of those species.

If approved, the proposed Plum Creek NFHCP would be the first of its kind in the northern Rockies. It outlines measures to conserve 17 native fish species, including eight species that are threatened or endangered, for a permit length of 30 years. The NFHCP offers improvements in road maintenance and construction, livestock grazing, timber harvest practices, land use and internal policies to benefit native fish. The DEIS evaluates how each of four proposed alternatives would provide habitat protection for streams, wetlands, riparian and upland areas, as well as the differences in protection provided by shorter permit lengths.

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“One requirement of Plum Creek’s NFHCP is that native fish habitat must be in better condition tomorrow than it is today,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Anne Badgley. “In addition, the Services must have the opportunity to work with Plum Creek to adapt management of their lands in the future to ensure adequate conservation of native fish.”

The Services provided technical assistance to Plum Creek to develop a plan that attempts to meet biological goals based on the “Four C’s” of habitat quality for all native salmonids: **Cold** (stream temperatures), **Clean** (in-stream sediment levels), **Complex** (in-stream habitat diversity) and **Connected** (restoration of connectivity among sub-populations of native fish). The NFHCP incorporates new approaches to conservation, such as: land management practices may be adapted as our understanding of fish conservation needs evolve, options exist for both the Services and Plum Creek to suspend or end participation in the permit if implementation of the permit does not meet necessary requirements, and a broad array of other conservation measures. Other alternatives to the NFHCP, including varying combinations of conservation opportunities, are also evaluated in the DEIS.

“Each HCP we help develop is unique to the landowner we are working with,” said National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Administrator Will Stelle. “We encourage each HCP applicant to tailor their management plan to the conditions found in each watershed, so that future actions will help to maintain or restore natural stream processes.”

Interested parties are encouraged to attend any of six “Open House” meetings to gather information and provide comments to the Services. All meetings will be from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m., on the following dates at the following locations:

January 11th - **Kelso, WA**, Red Lion Hotel, 510 Kelso Drive
January 12th - **Yakima, WA**, Cavanaugh’s Gateway, 9 North 9th St.
January 17th - **Libby, MT**, Venture Inn, 443 Highway 2 West
January 18th - **Kalispell, MT**, Outlaw Inn (Cavanaugh’s/Best Western), 1701 U.S. 93 South
January 19th - **Missoula, MT**, Holiday Inn Parkside, 200 South Pattee
January 20th - **Coeur d’Alene, ID**, Shilo Inn, 702 West Appleway

The Services will review and consider all public input presented during the comment period. A final EIS will then be published with a selected alternative identified, followed by a 30-day public review period. If the Services’ final decision is to issue an incidental take permit to Plum Creek, the NFHCP would be implemented at that time.

Written comments regarding the DEIS/NFHCP should be addressed to Ted Koch, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709 or Bob Ries, National Marine Fisheries Service, 530 South Asbury Street, Suite 2, Moscow, ID 83843.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fish and wildlife management assistance offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps State, Tribal and foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.

NOTE: This news release, related Q&As, and a map are also available on the Service’s Pacific Regional homepage on the Internet at <http://www.r1.fws.gov>. The DEIS/NFHCP and all related materials may also be viewed at: <http://www.fws.gov/r1srbo/SRBO/PlumCk.htm>.